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ABSTRACT

A survey called the Literacy Check-Up was conducted in South Carolina's Lancaster and Chester Counties in April-May 2000. The survey was designed to identify existing literacy services, determine how well the area's existing literacy programs were meeting participants' needs, and determine the community's capacity for serving adults in need of literacy services. Of the 345 surveys originally mailed, 45 (15%) were completed (including 9 from agencies/organizations providing literacy services). The Literacy Check-Up also included two focus meetings. The types of programs being offered included basic skills, family literacy, parent training, English as a second language, life skills, and religious education. The area's adult learners represented a broad range of age, racial, and socioeconomic groups. Literacy program staffing levels were inadequate, given the known percentage of the adult population in the study area who are at the two lowest levels of literacy proficiency. The following five steps for improving the area's existing literacy services were identified: (1) build a literacy system; (2) develop more workplace and health literacy programs; (3) recruit and train additional volunteers and professionals; (4) make better use of technology; and (5) create awareness of literacy issues. Tables detailing area literacy services and five levels of literacy proficiency are appended. (Contains 17 endnotes.) (MN)

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ED 466 619

A Literacy Check-up

For
Lancaster County
and
Fort Lawn and Great Falls
of Chester County

A Report of the
Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life at Clemson University
and
J. Marion Sims Foundation, Inc.

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A Literacy Check-up for Lancaster County and Fort Lawn and Great Falls of Chester County

Principle Authors

Elizabeth Peterson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Research Associate
South Carolina Center on Grassroots and Nonprofit Leadership
Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life
Clemson University
158 Poole Agricultural Center
Clemson, SC 29634-0132

Kathleen K. Wilson Ph.D.
Professor and Director
South Carolina Center on Grassroots and Nonprofit Leadership and
Center on Neighborhood Development
Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life
Clemson University
158 Poole Agricultural Center
Clemson, SC 29634-0132

Project Contributors

Joyce Ott, Ph.D.
Dottie Campbell, M.Ed.
Research Associates, Clemson University, Center for Neighborhood Development

Mary L. Barry
J. Marion Sims Foundation, Inc. Board of Trustees member

Jim Morton
President, J. Marion Sims Foundation, Inc.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In 1997 the J. Marion Sims Foundation, Inc. engaged in a strategic planning process to develop a funding strategy for its newly formed Defining Futures grantsmaking program. As part of this planning process, the issues related to sustaining healthy children, youth, families and communities in Lancaster County and the Fort Lawn and Great Falls areas of Chester County were identified. Based on the issues found, a strategic plan was developed to guide the Defining Futures program over the next decade. The first of several initiatives is to improve adult literacy and basic skills in the Foundation's service area. Improving literacy skills is critical to educating the whole person over a lifetime.

The Foundation conducted a survey in April and May 2001 to determine the level and extent of the current literacy services. This survey was called the Literacy Check-up. The purpose of the Literacy Check-up was to identify existing literacy services, determine how well adult literacy programs in the survey area are meeting the needs of those adults presently enrolled in literacy and basic skills programs. It also sought to determine the community's capacity for serving additional adults in need of literacy services.

The Literacy Check-up

The check-up was developed to determine the range and scope of literacy and basic skills programs in the survey area. A survey was conducted to determine: 1) Who is offering literacy services; 2) Whom they are serving; 3) What types of services are available; 4) Who are involved as teachers and tutors and what resources are available for them and 5) What resources are currently being spent on literacy. With this information it should be easier to determine where the gaps are in literacy services and where further attention needs to be directed. Community leaders should also have a better idea of what assets exist to build on and enhance service delivery.

Description of the Survey Process

As mentioned earlier, the Literacy Check-up effort is part of a strategic giving initiative sponsored by the J. Marion Sims Foundation. The Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life at Clemson University is a collaborative partner in developing and implementing the literacy initiative. The Literacy Check-up was conducted in two stages: the literacy survey followed by two focus group meetings.

The literacy survey was conducted in April and May 2001. At that time 356 surveys were mailed out to all educational institutions, community agencies, churches and many local businesses and industries in two separate mailings. Forty-six (46) surveys were returned by the post office. Therefore 310 organizations received surveys. To date 15% of the surveys (45) have been completed and returned. All of the surveys that were sent to known literacy providers have been returned. A number of the surveys were sent to churches, agencies, and businesses that do not offer literacy programs and were not returned. Data from the surveys that were returned have been compiled in a database by the research team at the Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life at Clemson University.

Two focus group meetings were held in June 2001 as the second stage of the check-up process. Representatives from the agencies that responded to the survey were asked to take part in the focus group sessions. Several local leaders who represented organizations that might have a vested interest in adult literacy were also invited to the focus group meetings. Notes from the discussion were recorded by members of the research team at the Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life.

Findings

Types of Programs. Of the 45 surveys returned, 9 responses were from agencies or organizations that indicated that they provided literacy services. The responses indicate that a variety of programs are offered in a number of different settings. Of the organizations that offer literacy services four (4) are educational institutions, one (1) is an adult literacy council, one (1) is a church, two (2) are social service agencies (one of which also listed itself as a health care agency), one (1) is a hospital and one (1) is a business/industry.

Literacy offerings also vary. Types of programs include: basic skills and literacy, family literacy, parent training, English as a Second Language (ESL), Life Skills and Other (religious education).

Characteristics of Adult Learners. Adult learners in Lancaster and Chester Counties reflect the diversity of the community. They represent a broad range in age, race, and socio-economic groups. The findings from the survey are indicative of the changing demographics in South Carolina and in the Southeast. Data from the 2000 census indicated that both Lancaster and Chester Counties have changed in

racial profile over the past decade. While whites and African Americans still represent the majority of the population, Asians, Hispanic and bi-racial individuals are increasing in number. A significant change in population characteristics for both counties has occurred over the last decade. The growth in the immigrant population has sparked the need for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and other life skill programs to help those who have recently arrived in the area. The growth of the senior population also suggests health literacy could become a major issue.

Program Staffing. Current full- and part-time staff figures indicate inadequate staffing levels given the known percentage of the total adult population in both counties that are at level one and two proficiency rates (The two lowest proficiency levels measured by the National Literacy Survey). Currently there are reportedly 23 full-time literacy staff members and 22 part-time staff members. In many communities across America the number of part-time staff and volunteers far outnumbers the number of full-time staff. Four programs had no full or part-time staff listed. It is assumed that when a provider indicated no full or part-time staff, the program is managed totally by volunteers. Therefore, forty-four percent (44%) of the programs currently providing literacy services in the survey area are doing so totally using volunteers with no paid staff. The various staff receives on average 26 hours of training. Most programs offer in-service workshops, but state and local conferences, continuing education, distance education, consultants and college credit have also been used as training options.

Volunteers provide a large percentage of literacy instruction. There are a reported 54 active volunteers in the survey area. There are another 96 individuals who have received literacy training, but are inactive volunteers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Literacy Check-up provides a glimpse of what literacy programming is like in Lancaster County and the Great Falls and Fort Lawn communities of Chester County. It is the first step in having the information needed to shape a full service literacy learning system for both counties.

Strengths. The greatest strength in both Lancaster and Chester Counties is in personnel. There is a good base from which to begin building a literacy learning system in both counties. While not sufficient to meet the need, there are 23 full-time staff members reportedly available to work with and through to begin building a strong literacy learning system within the survey area. There is also a good volunteer base and part-time staff base on which to build.

Gaps. Some of the most noticeable gaps include the following:

1. *Access to Programs*. While a few of the programs have services in several of the incorporated areas in both counties, participants indicated that most of the services offered are clustered in the more populous communities in Lancaster and Chester counties.

2. *Literacy Offerings*. Current literacy programs seem to be reaching a few of the traditional literacy students. There appears to be a shortage of workplace literacy and family literacy programs in the area. National demographic trends point to an increasing number of non-English language speakers. There has been an increase of non-English speakers in the past decade. There will be an increased need for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs.

3. Several focus group participants expressed their concern that there is a general apathy to improve literacy skills on the part of the community. Apathy appears to exist with adults who need services and with community leadership. Participants in both focus groups sessions expressed concern that there is just not enough involvement on the part of local groups and leaders.

Recommendations

At least five steps need to be taken to strengthen the existing literacy education delivery system in Lancaster County, and the Great Falls and Fort Lawn areas of Chester County. Each one of these steps has a critical role in the design of an effective literacy initiative. These steps are:

Step One: Building a Literacy System. There is currently not a system of literacy services that meets the needs in both counties. The building process requires that all stakeholders be engaged in its design and be responsible for its implementation.

Step Two: Program Development. It is clear that program development is essential for the growth and strengthening of the current literacy system. Some aspects of literacy (basic skills, family literacy, and life-skills) have already been developed to some extent. However, there are two aspects of literacy (workplace literacy and health literacy) that have not been fully addressed.

Step Three: Volunteer and Professional Recruitment and Staff Development. Recruiting and training volunteers and professional staff is an on-going challenge for all literacy providers. A better system for recruiting and training both teachers and volunteers is needed. Inservice training and development is also needed to provide continual support for teachers and volunteers.

Step Four: Better Use of Technology. Better use of technology is needed at all levels. Literacy providers need to use a variety of technologies effectively in their instruction and technology skill development needs to be a part of the total learning opportunities available.

Step Five: Creating an Awareness of Literacy Issues. Changing the existing attitudes toward literacy and learning is a challenge that the community must meet head on. There was some concern that many still do not understand the importance of literacy to function effectively as a parent, worker, citizen, or health consumer/provider.

An effective adult education and literacy system in Lancaster and Chester counties will not occur without strategically building it. Community leaders have a long way to go to build an effective literacy system.

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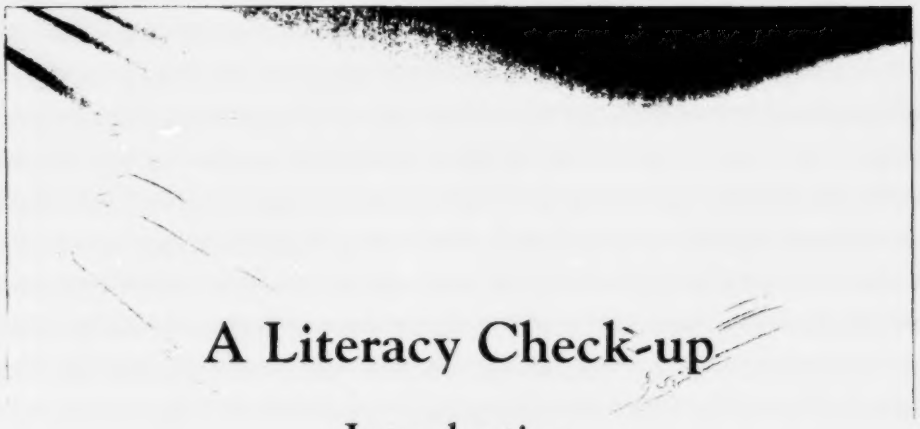

A Literacy Check-up

Introduction

In 1997 the J. Marion Sims Foundation, Inc. engaged in a strategic planning process to develop a funding strategy for its newly formed Defining Futures grantsmaking program. As part of this planning process, the issues related to sustaining healthy children, youth, families and communities in Lancaster County and the Fort Lawn and Great Falls areas of Chester County[1] were identified. Based on the issues found, a strategic plan was developed to guide the Defining Futures program over the next decade. The first of several initiatives is to improve adult literacy and basic skills in these two counties. Improving literacy skills is critical to educating the whole person over a lifetime.

To further determine what the current literacy service provider situation is, the Foundation conducted a survey in April and May 2001. This survey was called the Literacy Check-up. The purpose of the Literacy Check-up was to identify existing literacy services, determine how well adult literacy programs in the survey area are meeting the needs of those adults presently enrolled in literacy and basic skills programs, and to determine the community's capacity for serving additional adults in need of literacy services.

The J. Marion Sims Foundation's initiative is based on an understanding that unless adult learning needs are dealt with in these two counties economic development and economic prosperity cannot be expected to improve significantly. Programs aimed at improving adult development and meeting adult learning needs are generally not well funded and are frequently not available. Adults are defined for this purpose as individuals 17 years old and above. This definition conforms to the age range used nationally by the National Institute for Literacy.

High Rates of Low Adult Literacy Competence is an Issue of National Concern

Adults today need a wide variety of skills to "function" well in daily life. Some of the most routine tasks: helping a child with homework, using a computer and following the directions on a prescription bottle require strong literacy skills. In

1991, the definition of literacy was modified from its earlier meaning (i.e. being able to read and sign one's name) to include all of the basic skills needed to be "functional" in American society. Table 1 identifies what these basic skills include.

Literacy is "an individual's ability to read, write, and speak English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential (National Literacy Act of 1991)."[2]

In 1993 a National Literacy Survey revealed that more than 40 million adults had very low literacy skills. NALS measured adult proficiency on three literacy scales: prose literacy-the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts; document literacy-the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in documents (applications, maps, tables, etc.) and quantitative literacy-the knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations.

When literacy was simply thought of as reading, it was typically measured in grade-level equivalents. An adult's literacy skill was said to be at first grade or fifth grade, for example. A more complex, more realistic conception of literacy emphasizes its use in adult activities. To determine literacy skills in American adults ages 16 and older, the 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) used test items that resembled everyday life tasks. It involved the use of prose, document and quantitative skills. The NALS classified the results in five levels of proficiency with level one being the lowest level of proficiency and level five the highest. These levels are now commonly used to describe adults' literacy skill levels.

The *prose literacy* items assessed the adults' ability to handle written text such as editorials, news stories, poems and fiction. It assessed the ability to handle both expository and narrative prose. Expository prose involves printed information that defines, describes, or informs such as newspaper stories or written instructions. Narrative prose assessed the adults' ability to understand a story. Prose literacy tasks included locating all the information requested, integrating information from various parts of a passage of text, and writing new information related to the text.

Document literacy items assessed the adults' ability to understand short forms or graphically displayed information found in everyday life, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and graphs. Document literacy tasks included locating a particular intersection on a street map, using a schedule to choose the appropriate bus, or entering information on an application form.

Quantitative literacy information was displayed visually in graphs or charts or in numerical form using whole numbers, fractions, decimals, percentages, or time unites. These quantities appeared in both prose and document form. Quantitative literacy referred to locating quantities, integrating information from various parts of a document, determining the necessary arithmetic operation, and performing that operation. Quantitative literacy tasks included balancing a checkbook, completing an order form and determining the amount of interest paid on a loan.

Almost all adults in Level 1 can read a little but not well enough to fill out an application, read a food label, a medicine label, read a simple story to a child, or fill out a deposit slip correctly. Adults in level 2 usually can perform more complex tasks such as comparing, contrasting or integrating pieces of information but usually not higher level reading and problem-solving skills. For example, those at level 2 could correctly write their signature on a social security card and fill out a simple job application. But they could not read correctly a sales graph or figure out what the gross pay was on a pay check stub, or add correctly the cost of a meal. Adults in levels 3 through 5 usually can perform the same types of more complex tasks on increasingly lengthy and dense texts and documents. These levels use a broad range of information processing skills in various combinations. For example, people at level 3 could figure out bar charts and graphs but could not correctly read a bus schedule. They could not figure out the correct number of minutes that it would take to get from one location to another. People at level 4 could read the bus schedule but not summarize the views of parents and teachers found on a summary chart which involved comparing parent and teacher data across four questions and across three levels of schools. They could not correctly estimate the cost per ounce of a food product when given a food store shelf label with this information on it or figure out interest charges on a home loan.

In summary each scale was divided into five levels that reflect the progression of information-processing skills and strategies. These levels were determined not as a result of any statistical property of the scales, but rather as a result of shifts in the skills and strategies required to succeed on various tasks along the scales, from simple to complex.

For a review of the levels of literacy found in the National Adult Literacy survey see http://nces.ed.gov/naal/ . This site also contains samples from the survey instruments. See Table 4 in the Appendix.

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Table 1. The Four Fundamental Adult Literacy Skill Categories

Communication Skills
Read with understanding
Convey ideas in writing
Speak so others can understand
Listen actively
Observe critically
Decision Making Skills
Solve problems and make decisions
Plan
Use math to solve problems and communicate
Interpersonal Skills
Cooperate with others
Guide Others
Advocate and Influence
Resolve conflict and negotiate
Lifelong Learning Skills
Take responsibility for learning
Learn through research
Reflect and evaluate
Use information and communications technology

Many factors explain the relative high number of adults in the lowest level of literacy. Twenty-two percent of adults in Level 1 were immigrants who may have just been learning to speak English. More than 60% didn't complete high school. More than 30% were over 65. More than 25% had physical or mental conditions that kept them from fully participating in work, school, housework, or other activities and almost 20% had vision problems that affected their ability to read print.[3]

Adults at the two lowest levels are considered to be functionally illiterate. As a result of the national findings an effort was started to redirect attention and resources to improve adult literacy levels in America.

In September 2000, a National Literacy Summit was held for public and private stakeholders. In a report released by the steering committee, Summit leaders identified the challenges in building an effective literacy system in the United States. They also set priorities for meeting the literacy needs of Americans in the coming decade. These seven challenges are reviewed below. The challenges faced nationally are also those faced locally, according to state literacy leaders.

CHALLENGE - As a result of higher standards in K-12 education and the phasing out of remedial courses at institutions of higher education, the number of youth seeking - and being pointed toward - adult education services will increase. This is likely to put more pressure on an already strained system.

CHALLENGE 2 - The changing demographic makeup of the United States is increasing the number of people who need adult education and literacy services. Access to services is a critical issue, in terms of both the growing need and the varying concerns of different populations.

CHALLENGE 3 - Adults need more opportunities to gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet changing job demands and to succeed in the workforce.

CHALLENGE 4 - Learning disabilities (LD) are increasingly recognized as a major factor in the low literacy of adults, but too little is known - even among practitioners - about the nature and scope of the problem, the ways it affects adult learning, and how it should be addressed. Moreover, too few adults with LD are being identified and receiving appropriate instruction and accommodations.

CHALLENGE 5 - New technology is profoundly changing the way we live, work, and learn. This technology both requires and facilitates lifelong learning. But the adult education and literacy field has not yet taken full advantage of the potential technology has for transforming adult learning.

CHALLENGE 6 - Public support for improving education for our nation's youth is increasing, but we lack that same support for improving adult education and literacy programs. We need to create a better understanding of the importance of adult education and literacy to the nation's (and Lancaster and Chester counties) well being.

CHALLENGE 7 - Providing high quality, consistent services to adult learners is limited by a variety of critical programmatic factors. Among the most pressing are: a lack of consensus on goals, serious limitations of staff time and professional development opportunities, lack of research and information on best practices, mismatches between program structure and learners' needs, and the lack of active attention to adult learners as whole people.

According to the NALS report, an estimated 56% of all South Carolinians have literacy skills at the two lowest levels.[4] Lancaster County (at 60 %) and Chester County (at 68%) have illiteracy rates higher than those found statewide. South Carolina's literacy status can be closely linked to other issues such as prevailing poverty conditions, high drop out rates, low achievement during the school years, low wages, low school readiness scores, high numbers of emergency room visits and expenses, high Medicaid and Medicare expenses, high hospitalization rates, low workforce productivity and juvenile delinquency. Young adults and seniors are more likely to be dependent and vulnerable. Welfare recipients, single mothers and seniors are much more likely to have less than a high school education. Persons who have not mastered basic skills are at a constant disadvantage. Even if employed, many do not have jobs that pay enough to provide for a family

Today the costs of adult illiteracy are evident. Over half of the adults in both Lancaster and Chester Counties are functionally illiterate by national standards. Low literacy levels clearly are taking their toll on both counties. The situation with children (high drop out rates and low school readiness scores) can be linked to the low levels of literacy found in the adult population. Illiteracy affects children, youth and adults and is costing residents millions annually. The human toll is even greater than the financial toll.

According to a 1993 report from the U.S. Department of Education, just fewer than 10% of the total number who need literacy services in South Carolina received them.[5] As shall be seen in the findings section of this report, the number currently being served in the survey area is less than 1% of those who need to be served. Program completion continues to be a challenge in adult education. Completion and recruitment rates appear to be more successful in nonprofit and business literacy education settings than in educational settings.

The Status of Adult Literacy Learning Opportunities in the Survey Area

Currently there are a number of literacy programs in Lancaster County and in nearby communities in Chester County. However according to participants in this literacy check-up these programs do not seem to be meeting the needs of all who are in need of literacy services. To maximize the possibility for success, any new initiatives should be based on a clear understanding of what is already being done in both counties. The overall effectiveness of the existing efforts also needs to be determined.

There are 74,758 adults ages 15 and up in the survey area (Chester County: 26,444 and Lancaster County: 48,314) according to the 2000 U.S. Census.[6] The Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) is the only adult assessment system of its kind to be approved and validated by the U.S. Department of Education in the area of adult literacy. Using the CASAS estimates as the base, 17,981 (68%) adults 15 years of age and older in Chester County are estimated to have level one and two literacy skills. Sixty percent or 28,988 of adults 15 years of age and older are estimated to be at level one and two literacy skills in Lancaster County. The state average is approximately 56%. Therefore Chester County is approximately 12% higher than the state average and Lancaster County is 4% higher than the state average. The national average for the number of adults at level one and two literacy proficiency is 58%. South Carolina is therefore 2% lower than the national average. Chester County is 10% higher and Lancaster County is 2% higher than the national average.

According to a report issued by the South Carolina State Board of Education, in the year 2000, 9324 students took the GED (General Educational Development) exam statewide with a pass rate of 58%. The pass rate for students in Lancaster County is slightly higher than the state. Currently 98 students in Lancaster County are reportedly enrolled in adult education sponsored by the school district and 63 were enrolled in literacy programs through the Lancaster County Literacy Council. In 2000, 74 students registered to take the GED exam. Forty-four (44) students (59%) passed the exam. In the Chester County school district, 508 students are enrolled in adult education. Eighty-four (84) students registered to take the GED exam in 2000. Forty-six (46) students (55%) passed the exam.[7]

The Literacy Check-up

The check-up was developed to determine the range and scope of literacy and basic skills programs in the survey area. A survey was sent to 356 agencies, organizations and churches as well as local businesses and industries to determine: 1) Who is offering literacy services; 2) Who they are serving; 3) What types of services are available; 4) Who are involved as teachers and tutors and what resources are available for them and 5) What resources are currently being spent on literacy. With this information it should be easier to determine where the gaps are in literacy services and where further attention needs to be directed. Community leaders should also have a better idea of what assets exist to build on and enhance service delivery.

Findings of the Check-up

Description of the Survey Process

As mentioned earlier, the Literacy Check-up effort is part of a strategic giving initiative sponsored by the J. Marion Sims Foundation. The Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life at Clemson University is a collaborative partner in developing and implementing the literacy initiative. The Literacy Check-up was conducted in two stages: the literacy survey followed by two focus group meetings.

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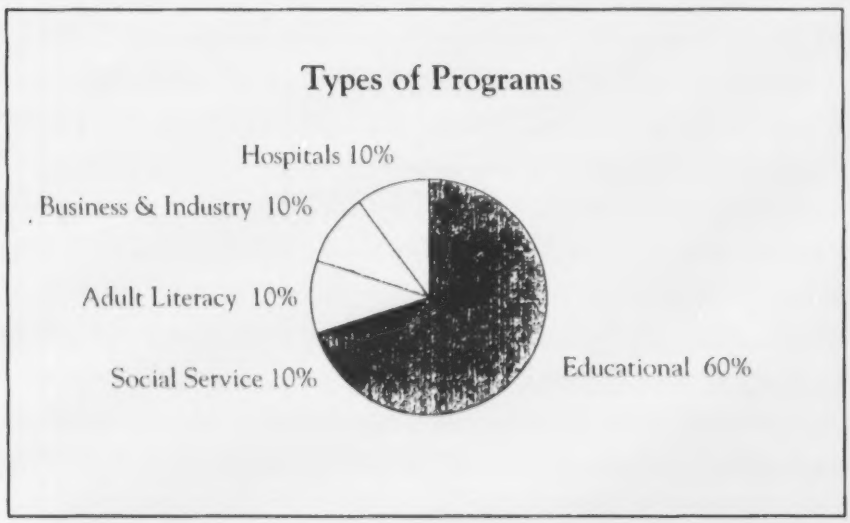

Types of Programs

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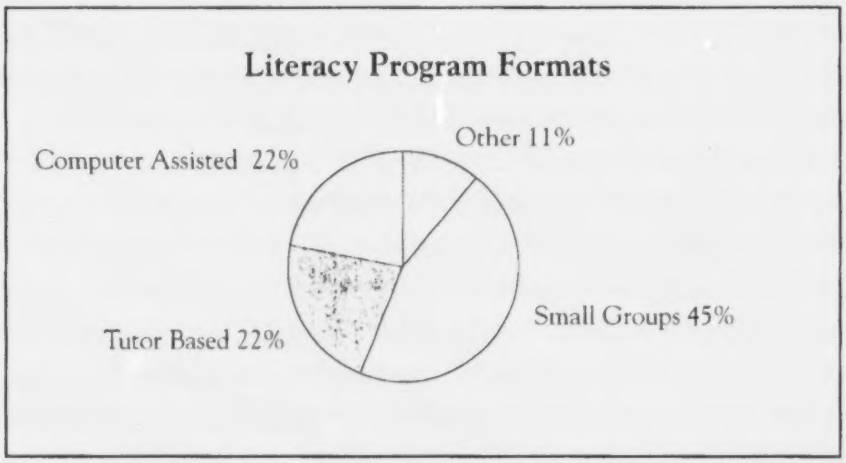
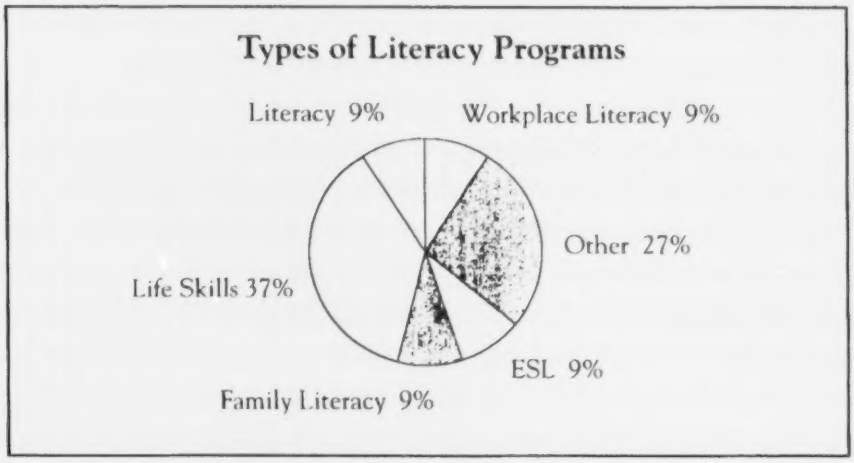
From the agencies that responded, it is clear that literacy instruction is offered in a variety of formats. Four (4) programs use literacy volunteers and provide one-on-one instruction. Four (4) programs provide computer assisted instruction, five (5) programs make use of small group or classroom instruction, and 1 program uses video or distance education. One respondent indicated that their program also makes referrals to the local literacy council.



The literacy offerings also vary. Two programs indicated that they provide basic literacy instruction. Both of the programs use materials and resources that are appropriate for literacy instruction. The other types of programming included: GED (General Educational Development) (1), workplace literacy (1), Adult Basic Education (1), family literacy (1), parent training (1), English as a Second Language (ESL) (1), Life Skills (3), and Other (2). The programs that emphasized other skills included one program at a church that combined Bible studies, literacy instruction and family support, and one program that emphasized early childhood development, but not within the context of family literacy.



Who is Being Served?

Basic Literacy/Family Literacy. The numbers reported on the survey indicate that approximately 157 adults are enrolled in literacy programs. Sixty-three (63) are enrolled through the Literacy Council and 94 are enrolled through Head Start. Head Start reported that there are 40 adults currently on a waiting list and 92 adults have completed literacy instruction through the Head Start program. The surveys indicate that only 2 students dropped out of the Head Start program during the current year.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). One hundred four (104) adult learners are currently enrolled in ESOL programs. To date none of these students has completed instruction and reportedly no one has dropped out.

GED/High School Completion. It was reported on the survey that two hundred and fifty-one (251) students are enrolled in GED courses in Lancaster County. Twenty-five (25) completed the program and forty-one (41) dropped out. It should be noted that according to the S.C. Department of Education, seventy-four (74) adults in Lancaster County took the GED test in 2000. Forty-four (44) students (59%) passed the test.[8] In Chester County Eighty-four (84) students took the GED test. Forty-six (46) students (55%) passed the test. Ninety-eight (98) students are enrolled in the High School completion program. Thirty-nine (39) diplomas were awarded in Lancaster County during the 1999-2000 school year. In Chester County 47 diplomas were awarded during the same school year.

Life Skills. The Lancaster County Council on Aging enrolls ninety-two (92) adult learners in Life Skills programs offered. Seven hundred (700) students have completed Life Skills instruction through the Catawba Technology Educational Consortium (CTEC) and none have dropped out. It is not certain that all of the 700 students that were counted on the survey were residents of Lancaster and Chester county, therefore these students were not included in future references to student totals. CTEC serves York, Chester and Lancaster counties and therefore has a service area that is beyond the scope of the J. Marion Sims Foundation's initiative.

Other. Fifty-five (55) more adult learners were listed as being enrolled in the "other" category. One (1) of these programs is provided at a local church that indicated that they took a "broad" view of adult literacy. The church provides biblical and religious instruction for low-level readers. Fifteen (15) adults participate in that program. The other facility is a child-care center. The center provides literacy and parenting skills instruction to 40 adults. According to their report 10 are waiting to enter the program, 36 adults have already completed the program. Only 4 adults dropped the program.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

Adult learners in Lancaster and Chester Counties reflect the diversity of the community. They represent a broad range in age, race, and socio-economic groups.

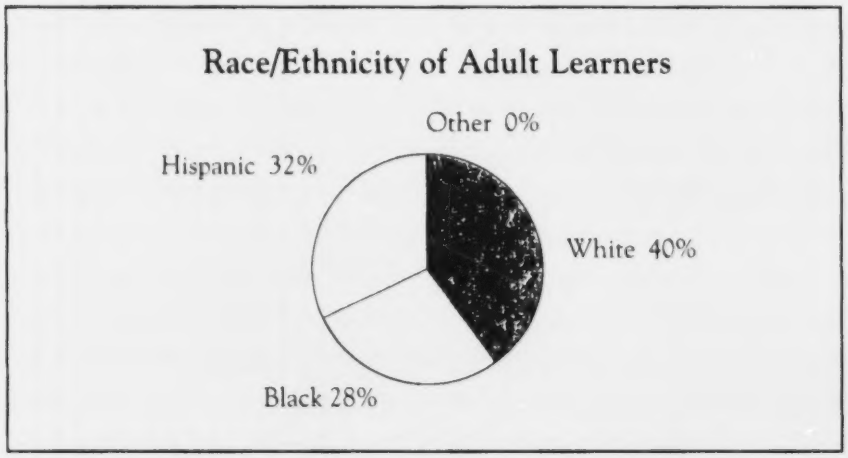
The findings from the survey are indicative of the changing demographics in South Carolina and in the Southeast. Data from the 2000 census indicated that both Lancaster and Chester Counties have changed in racial profile over the past decade. While whites and African Americans still represent the majority of the population, Asians, Hispanic and bi-racial individuals are increasing in number. A significant change in population characteristics for both counties has occurred over the last decade. The growth in the immigrant population has sparked the need for ESOL and other life skill programs to help those who have recently arrived in the area. The growth of the senior population also suggests health literacy could become a major issue. The information in the following section represents the data on the adult learners in all program areas.

There were a total of 373 adults enrolled in the 9 programs offered in the survey area.[9] Based on the 2000 U.S. Census data, there are

46,969 adults, ages 15[10] and older, at level one and two literacy proficiency in the survey area. Although this is an extrapolated number it is reasonable to think that the figures fairly represent the current situation. *Therefore, only .007 percent (i.e. less that 1%) of the target learners are engaged in literacy learning opportunities in the survey area. Clearly there is a long way to go in meeting the need that exists.*

Race. The diversity of the community is also evident in the distribution of adult learners by race and/or ethnicity. Responses from the survey indicate that 121 learners are white; 87 are black; 98 are Hispanic; and 1 was described as other. In the comment section the respondent indicated that the participant described as "other" was an ESOL student from Liberia.

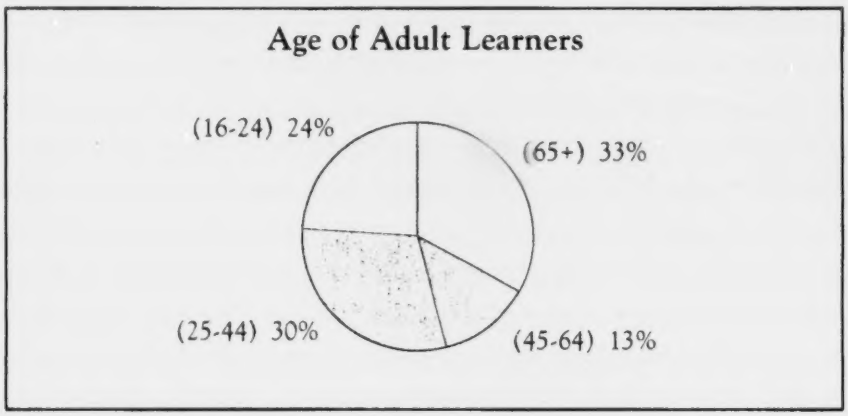
The number of Hispanic and Latino adults is a new development in Lancaster and Chester counties as it is in other South Carolina counties. New commerce and industry in South Carolina has created a need in some counties for low-paid, non-skilled laborers. Often times these jobs have been filled by workers who are recent immigrants from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Asia. This trend is expected to continue in South Carolina as it has in the rest of the nation.



Age. When asked to report the ages of the adult learners enrolled in their program, providers reported that 91 are 16-24 years of age; 111 are 25-44 years of age; 49 are 45-64 years of age and 121 are over 65 years of age. It is not surprising that so many of the adult learners are over the age of 65. The 2000 Census indicates that, particularly in Lancaster County, the senior population has increased over this past decade. The local population is aging. Younger families are leaving. Seniors are retiring to the area.

Generally adult literacy programs are thought to attract younger adults who find that they need better literacy skills to either find a job or to advance at their current workplace. Parenting and family literacy programs also tend to attract younger adults who are raising families, although many grandparents also take an active role in rearing the young.

Adults between the ages of 45-64 are not as apt to be enrolled in a literacy program unless it is offered in connection with work, or unless employers provide learning opportunities for their employees as a part of their benefit packages. These are prime working years, the years when many adults reach the pinnacle of their careers. It is somewhat surprising that adults in this age group, given the changing profile of industry in these two counties, are not attracted to literacy programs that might give them a better chance of advancing on the job. However, there are currently too few learning opportunities available.



Gender. There is an almost equal distribution of males and females enrolled in adult literacy programs in the survey area. The data revealed that 185 males and 188 females were enrolled in literacy programs.

Socio-economic Information. It is often difficult to determine the socio-economic status of individuals and families. Employment and salary information, although unreliable, is one way to estimate a family's economic situation. When asked for the adult learners' income sources providers indicated that most of the learners are employed. One hundred twenty four (124) learners are described as full-time employees and 15 are employed part-time. One hundred eight (108) are described as unemployed or looking for employment.

The Department of Commerce's 1998 business profile information indicates that the median family income in Chester and Lancaster Counties was approximately $31,600 to $32,400. These figures hardly changed at all during this past decade; the decade of unparalleled national economic growth and prosperity. If these incomes were adjusted for inflation, it would actually mean that earning power of individuals and families went down during this past decade in both counties. Workforce literacy programs are going to be needed to significantly change this earning power profile. These programs would naturally need to be combined with concerted economic development initiatives to bring in higher paying jobs and retool the local workforce to handle them. Even though there are too few programs available in both counties, half of those attending current programs work full time. This indicates that some understand the need and want to increase their literacy level and basic skills.

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Program Staffing

Paid Staff. Current full- and part-time staff figures indicate inadequate staffing levels given the known percentage of the total adult population in both counties that are at level one and two proficiency rates. Currently there are reportedly 23 full-time literacy staff members and 22 part-time staff members. In many communities across America the number of part-time staff and volunteers far outnumbers the number of full-time staff. Four programs had no full or part-time staff listed. It is assumed that when a provider indicated no full or part-time staff, the program is managed totally by volunteers. Therefore, forty-four percent (44%) of the programs responding to the survey area are doing so totally using volunteers with no paid staff.

Staff Training. The various staff receives on average 26 hours of training. Training is provided in a number of ways. Most programs offer in-service workshops, but state and local conferences, continuing education, distance education, consultants, and college credit have also been used as training options. Some of the topics that have been addressed through training are: strategies for teaching literacy, developing materials, testing and assessment, classroom management, effective practices for literacy development, working with adults with learning disabilities and record keeping.

Volunteers. Volunteers provide a large percentage of literacy instruction. There are 54 active literacy volunteers in the survey area. There are another 96 individuals who have received literacy training, but are inactive volunteers. The literacy volunteers received an average of 10 hours of training. The volunteer training is conducted in much the same way as it is for staff. Most of the training is done through in-service workshops, but other strategies are used as well. Some of the topics include: CPR-First Aid, age appropriate materials, testing and assessment, effective practice, adults with learning disabilities and record keeping.

Recruitment. A number of strategies are used to recruit students and volunteers. Programs indicated that they use radio and television public service announcements, messages promoted through churches and civic groups and flyers and newspaper ads as strategies to recruit students. A number of students come to the programs through referrals from other agencies. Frequently students hear about programs from a friend—word of mouth is a very important recruitment mechanism. Volunteers are recruited using many of the same strategies that are used to recruit students. The United Way and The Chamber of Commerce were also listed as sources of volunteers.

Support Services for Students. Support services are important for students who might otherwise find it difficult to participate in a literacy program. Research has shown that learners who are successful in completing a literacy program have a strong system of support. Child care, transportation, meals or snacks, free learning

materials, counseling services and health screening were all listed as support services that are available to students.

Benefits/Rewards for Volunteers. Because volunteers are unpaid, many programs try to build in benefits or other types of recognition for volunteer workers. Child-care, transportation, meals/snacks, free materials and training, rewards and other recognition were all listed as benefits that are available for literacy volunteers.

Program Funding

Approximately $153,000 dollars is now being spent per year on literacy services in the survey area. This figure translates into spending $498.37 per learner (total of 373) within the survey area. For both counties the number of people estimated with level one and two literacy proficiency is 46,969. Current programming is reaching less than 1% of these adults. Programs in Lancaster County and portions of Chester County receive funding from a number of sources. Local government is the largest contributor (18%). Nearly 17% of literacy dollars come from federal funds. The state contributes 5.6%. Other funding sources include corporate donations (6%), private donations (1%) and other donations-gifts, in-kind (30%). Clearly, funding is inadequate to meet the present need.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Literacy Check-up provides a glimpse of what literacy programming is like in Lancaster County and the Great Falls and Fort Lawn communities of Chester County. It is the first step in having the information needed to shape a full service literacy learning system for both counties. In addition to the survey, two focus groups were conducted involving leaders from the survey area. The participants in the focus groups were invited to come together to talk about what is currently being done to address the literacy needs for adults in both counties. Literacy providers discussed the services that are offered and identified areas of need. Eight questions guided the discussions.

Focus Group Questions

1. Who are we (as literacy providers) and what are we doing?
2. Whom do we serve?
3. How are we doing at reaching those we want to reach?
4. Whom are we not serving and why?
5. What resources do we have?
6. What would we like to do that we currently cannot do?
7. What are the barriers that prevent us from doing more?
8. Can we think of ways to better work together?

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In response to questions #1 and #2 a matrix of literacy services was developed during the focus group. The matrix illustrates participant's perceptions of the existing adult literacy services. See Table 2 in the Appendix for results. Responses to the remaining questions are included in the following narrative. Data obtained from the literacy survey or from research is also offered in the narrative to support focus group assertions.

Strengths

The greatest strength in both Lancaster and Chester Counties is in personnel. There is a good base from which to begin building a literacy learning system in both counties. While not sufficient to meet the need, as many as 23 full-time staff members may be available to work with and through to begin building a strong literacy learning system within the survey area. There is also a good volunteer base and part-time staff base on which to build. The full-time literacy providers combined with part-time and volunteer providers make it possible to reach a broad number of adults in a variety of programs. Training opportunities and support services make it possible for teachers and tutors to serve low literate adults.

Research suggests that small group instruction is strongly recommended for literacy instruction, although is some cases individual tutoring may be necessary. Both Lancaster and Chester counties currently use both forms of instruction. Perhaps more effort needs to be placed on training teachers and tutors to work with small groups.

Another strength is that leaders from the nine literacy programs are willing to be involved in increasing and enhancing existing services. They all recognize that more needs to be done. They know deeper involvement is necessary. There is a

positive literacy system change environment among literacy providers, who indicate a willingness to collaborate and communicate with one another and to do more if resources are made available.

Gaps

It is apparent from this matrix that there are some gaps in the literacy service system both in type of program and level of involvement. (See Table 3 in the Appendix.) Focus group participants were asked to rate their level of involvement by indicating a "1" if they thought their organization had little or no involvement. They rated a "2" if there was moderate involvement and "3" if there was deep involvement in providing a particular kind of literacy education. The general consensus was that more programs are needed and that existing programs needed to be operating at level "3". What is offered is considered good, but there is not enough, given the known need. Some of the most noticeable gaps include the following:

Access to Programs. While a few of the programs have services in several of the incorporated areas in both counties, participants indicated that most of the services offered are clustered in the more populous communities in Lancaster and Chester Counties. The city of Lancaster and the towns of Heath Springs and Kershaw were most widely represented in Lancaster County. Great Falls and Fort Lawn also are sites within Chester County. There is some growth in the northwestern corner of Lancaster County (Indian Land) where there is beginning to be some "spill over" from the Charlotte area. Although this community seems to be the site of more "upscale" development, the area is still largely rural. Transportation is considered a key issue. There is no public transportation system that can bring those who may need services to the service sites. In 1990, 13.9% of the families in Chester County and 11.9% of families in Lancaster County reported not having a car. The 2000 census figures are not yet available.

Literacy Offerings. Current literacy programs seem to be reaching a few of the traditional literacy students. This is evidenced by the large number of literacy students who are 65 years and older that were reported on the survey. Why they are taking classes in not yet known. Based on national trends, these adults are probably furthering their education in their later years to fulfill a lifelong learning dream or to learn new skills needed for senior living realities. A representative from the Lancaster County Council on Aging expressed her concern that the older adults are not being adequately served. 2000 Census data and the 2001 Mature Adult Count would substantiate that impression.[11] Her own informal assessment indicates that most of the adults who enter her agency are in need of literacy services. However when asked, most say that they do not want to participate in literacy instruction. There is a real reluctance to come forward and admit that help is needed. This would indicate the need for literacy providers to use forms of instruction and

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programming other than formal schooling to reach this group. Learning will need to be immediate, useful and directly related to current need. Healthy literacy programs are usually needed for such populations. Seniors are particularly known to have health literacy issues due to declining cognitive functions, increasing complexity of medical conditions and to having less education on average than members of other age groups.

There is a shortage of workplace literacy programs in the survey area—only 1 was found. According to available data there are a sizeable number of businesses and industries producing goods and services in the survey area with an estimated 59% of their workforce at level one and two in Chester County and 62% for Lancaster County.[12] Therefore, opportunities for workers to increase literacy skills directly related to enhanced performance on the job is very low. In economic terms, the productivity level of these employees is less than it could be. Businesses are losing revenue, and productivity is lower than it could be for these two counties. Businesses will not be able to compete in such an environment. Therefore, the small business environment in particular is expected to suffer. Small businesses are known to be the backbone of a local economy. Low literacy skills may be manifested by increased injuries on work sites. Employers may have to recruit from outside the survey area for the higher skilled, higher wage jobs at their respective businesses. This picture represents lost opportunity for a significant portion of the adult population in the survey area. It represents a situation where the quality of life of local adults may continue to decline as the declining wages—adjusted for inflation—for the past decade would indicate.

Because the current profile of children and youth indicates that low functioning literacy issues are perpetuating themselves generation after generation, the reader should not assume that the problem will go away once the current adult population dies. Rather, the emerging picture is one of disparity—of locals and some immigrants not having what is needed to earn a decent wage in order to insure health, safety and well-being and another population moving in that has higher literacy levels and secures the higher paying jobs.

Having a sufficient number of family literacy programs in both counties is going to be extremely important to break the present cycle. Family literacy programs have proven to be very effective in working with young adults in the 16-24 year age range. There currently is only 1 family literacy program reported in the survey area.

The 2000 Census indicates that there are 4,241 families with children under 18 in Chester County and 7,741 families with children under 18 in Lancaster County. Forty percent (40.2%) in Chester County and 33.7% in Lancaster County are single parent families. This trend has been increasing approximately 10% per decade since 1970. Female-headed households are known to be particularly vulnerable to the effects of and to the perpetuation of low literacy skills. Over 3,362 children and youth in Chester County and 4,908 children and youth in Lancaster

County are Medicaid recipients. Poverty level circumstances are also highly associated with low literacy situations. The costs connected with these numbers are in the millions annually in these two counties alone. For example, based on national research averages one can estimate that Chester County is spending $2.9 million yearly on Medicaid outlays for children from birth to age18 that can be associated with literacy issues (i.e. costs that wouldn't have to be spent if literacy levels were higher). The figure is $4.3 million annually in Lancaster County. When the cost of school readiness programs which aim to deal with lack of school readiness issues and the costs connected with unnecessary use of emergency rooms and hospitalizations are added to these other expenditures a very, very conservative estimate would be that well over $10 million spent annually in each county may be associated with low literacy levels.

Implementing more family literacy programs in the survey area is a necessary ingredient in the mix of strategies to improve child, youth and family health, safety and well being in both counties. Family literacy programs are also known to help recruit more adults needing help and to retain them longer. Family literacy combined with health literacy learning is known to significantly boost student recruitment and retention rates.

Demographic trends point to an increasing population of non-English language speakers. The 2000 Census clearly shows that the ethnic and racial profile of both counties is changing. Both counties are showing increasing multi-racial population. There are American Indians, Asian Indians, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, "other Asian", native Hawaiians, Hawaiian Pacific islanders, Samoans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and those of other Hispanic origins now present in both counties. The rates are significant, and based on national trends, would indicate that there will be substantial settlements of these races within this next decade in both counties. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs are going to be needed. Family and health literacy programs are usually also needed for such populations.

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Community Attitudes. Several focus group participants expressed their concern that there is a general apathy to enhance literacy skills on the part of the community. Reportedly apathy to deal with the literacy issues in both counties exists in both adults who need literacy services and with community leadership in the public and private sector. Historically the textile industry and related support industries supplied a good livelihood for adults in the surrounding area. Reportedly many people have difficulty accepting that times have dramatically changed and that they are now ill equipped to personally adapt to all of the changes. By all indications there is a need for literacy programs which will help retrain and retool the workforce of tomorrow that will require a higher level of literacy.

Participants at both focus group meetings expressed concern that there is just not enough involvement on the part of local groups and leaders. One indication is that few churches are involved in literacy instruction, although churches are perceived to be an ideal location for literacy programs. One focus group participant expressed the opinion that another indication is that few business leaders apparently think that there is a problem worth being involved in or that literacy affects their bottom line.

Next Steps in Building a Greater Understanding of What is Available

At least five steps need to be taken to strengthen the existing literacy education delivery system in Lancaster County, and the Great Falls and Fort Lawn area of Chester County. Each one of these steps has a critical role in the design of an effective literacy initiative.

Step One: Building a Literacy System. Successful literacy programs require investment by all partners in an active relationship that is dedicated to the success of the program. It is clear from the survey and forum data that there is a need for greater community involvement. There are many untapped resources (churches, business and industry, and community organizations).

One critical aspect of building a strong coherent literacy system is having someone who serves as a system coordinator for the entire service region. The South Carolina State Department of Education has structured an adult education system that provides services and support to local communities. There is one statewide Literacy Resource Center (located in Columbia) and four regional centers (located in Columbia, Florence, Greenville and Beaufort).[11] There is also a statewide Workplace Literacy Resource Center (in Laurens) as well as a new center in Barnwell that will focus on adult education for adults with learning disabilities. The staff at the literacy resource centers work with adult education directors and train staff, develop curriculum, and provide technical assistance to literacy programs at the local level.

One role of an adult education system coordinator would be to leverage support for literacy and basic skills learning opportunities from local business, education and community leaders to build a literacy partnership among local providers. Right now there are a few institutions and agencies that are providing literacy programs. As the matrix (Table 3 in the Appendix) indicates, many of the agencies that should be involved in literacy are either not involved or only moderately involved.

There is a need for more coordination between the agencies that are now providing services and for more effort to maximize public and private sector agency involvement. More concerted effort is required to build a system of literacy services through active involvement of adult education, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, technical colleges, chambers of commerce, key business leaders, DSS, DHEC and the Employment Security Commission.

There currently is not a system of literacy services that meets the needs in both counties. One has to be built. The building process requires that all stakeholders be engaged in its design and be responsible for its implementation. Among the stakeholders are the resources needed to build and sustain the system. Systems development must be worked at continuously and must include partnership building, strategic planning and implementation.

Step Two: Program Development. It is clear that program development is essential for the growth and strengthening of the current literacy system. Some aspects of literacy (basic literacy, family literacy and life-skills) have already been developed to some extent. For these programs the primary task would be to expand the programs to reach more people and insure quality programming. (Although it is not clear what the true quality of current efforts is as little evaluation data exist.) Currently accessibility is a real issue. Programs are clustered in the more populated communities and without a strong public transportation system, they are too far out of the way for people in the rural areas to be able to use.

Two aspects of adult literacy that have not been fully addressed are workplace literacy and health literacy. Workplace literacy programs are unlike standard literacy programs in that they are based on the literacy skills workers use on the job or will need for the near future. As organizations move toward high performance, the literacy skills that are needed by the worker have increased. In Lancaster County and the Great Falls and Fort Lawn area of Chester County, there are 1,698 businesses and industries, with 70 being major employers of the workforce. All the major employers were asked to complete survey. Only one industry responded; it indicated that it offers an on-site workplace literacy program.

While smaller scale businesses tend to rely on the technical college system for their training needs, including literacy, the technical college system supporting both counties does not offer adequate learning opportunities for level one and two literate adults. Adults are not using the Department of Education Adult Education

programs in sufficient numbers either. Recruitment may be a problem because these two institutions are associated in adult minds as "more schooling". If they found school a negative experience there is little incentive to draw them into these types of learning environments. In addition, in general programs offered through adult education tend to conform to the institution's needs and scheduling rather than the timing needs of these adults, particularly those working second and third shifts.[14]

As the age of the adult population increases so will the need for a better health care system. Health literacy is an essential element for healthy families and individuals. Health literacy involves increasing literacy skills while at the same time focusing on health-related decision making and healthy behaviors. One can be literate in other aspects and not be health literate. At this time South Carolina leads the nation in several health-related illnesses. Many of these illnesses (heart disease, diabetes, stroke) can be prevented or controlled. Health literacy programs are necessary for teaching children, youth and adults the literacy skills necessary to safeguard their own health and the health of their families.

In addition, the population in both counties is aging. The largest percentage gains in population during the last decade in both counties were with adults 45 and older. There were actually losses in population in the 20-34age range. If the number of youth and children in both counties in special education due to diagnosed disabilities of one form and degree or another are added to these figures, health literacy programs become essential to insuring a healthy population. Otherwise, tax dollars and personal budgets will become increasingly strained to deal with the effects of low literacy and low health literacy skills.

Because of the changing demographics in Lancaster and Chester Counties, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs will become more and more needed for immigrant families to adjust to their new environment. The literacy survey indicated that the Lancaster Literacy Council and Adult Education both provide ESOL instruction, but as the non-English speaking population grows,

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the learning opportunities will need to expand. Community groups, churches, the local library, the workplace and public schools all need to be ready to assist individuals who may have limited English language skills.

There is a general trend among the population in the United States of becoming more and more isolated and less and less involved in community affairs. Many are not exercising their rights or responsibilities as citizens. National leaders understand that citizen involvement is not apt to increase unless we can reverse the trend of declining literacy rates.

In order to be effective citizens individuals must possess the literacy skills needed to take informed action to make a positive difference in their lives, their communities and their world. Citizens becoming and staying involved, forming and expressing opinions and ideas, working together, and taking action is essential to strengthen communities. All these basic functions involve being functionally literate. Presently, half of the population in both counties will have trouble being effective citizens and engaged in community efforts because they are not functionally literate. More needs to be done in both counties to increase citizen/community member literacy development.

Finally, more needs to be done to diagnose and assist adult learners who have learning disabilities. Nationally it is estimated that 55% of young adults who have dropped out of school and return to adult basic skills (ABE) and literacy programs have mild to moderate learning disabilities. Some experts have estimated that the incidence of learning disabilities among the ABE population may be as high as 80%.[15] According to the State Plan released by the South Carolina State Department of Education, eight thousand adults with learning disabilities were served in the state over the last three years.[16]

While some low literacy proficient adults may not have learning disabilities themselves, others will have children with a variety of learning disabilities. According to the 2001 Kids Count, in Chester County 13.8% of all 6-7 year olds are placed in special education classes and 18.3% of 6-7 years olds in Lancaster County are placed in such classes. In Chester County 18.6% of all 8-9 year olds are placed in special education and 13% of all Lancaster County 8-9 year olds are placed in these classes. When all the figures are put together, it appears that at least 25% of the population in both counties has some form of learning disability.

A typical ABE or literacy program is not tailored to address the needs of those experiencing learning disabilities. Such programs do not provide a structure that is sufficient to help these learners achieve their instructional and career goals. In Lancaster and Chester Counties, the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Literacy Council are trying to address the needs of this population, but if these estimates are accurate, much more is needed to support this effort. Teachers, tutors, support staff, and counselors need to know how to best serve this population. With the creation of the statewide resource center, there soon should be information

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and technical support available to assist program directors and teachers.

Step Three: Volunteer and Professional Recruitment and Staff Development. Recruiting and training volunteers and professional staff is an on-going challenge for all literacy providers. One issue that arose in one of the focus group meetings was the inherent distrust that some adults who are in need of literacy services have of teachers and schools. This makes it very difficult to attract participants who are hard to reach. Volunteers and teachers need to be sensitive to the fears of adult learners. There should be a strategy in place for recruiting volunteers and teachers who can relate to the adult learner. The instructional environment must not appear to be school like in style. One suggestion was to make better use of former participants who have successfully completed the literacy program. A cadre of former participants could serve as literacy advocates. They could be trained to talk to business and community leaders. They could solicit support for literacy by sharing their stories and successes. It was also suggested that former participants could be encouraged to become literacy tutors themselves. New learners may be able to relate better to a tutor/teacher whose experience is similar to their own.

Staff development is critical for all literacy tutors and teachers. As noted earlier, staff development is one of the seven critical literacy system development challenges facing all of the United States, as well as South Carolina. Many tutors have no prior background in teaching. Twenty hours of tutor training is typically required for all literacy tutors. More training is available if tutors wish to take advantage of it. There needs to be a systematic process for assessing tutor/teacher training needs and providing adequate support and assistance to teachers and tutors who are in need of more training. The literacy resource centers are available to provide initial and in-service training for all literacy personnel.

Step Four: Better Use of Technology. Better use of technology is needed at all levels. Literacy providers need to use a variety of technologies in their instruction and technology skill development needs to be a part of the total learning opportunities available. Business and industry rely greatly on computer technology thus raising the bar for literacy programs. For the 21st century workplace, advanced skill levels will be required and computer skills must be mastered.[17] According to the survey several programs provide computer literacy and computer based literacy instruction with varying degrees of success. For example, the local library would like to expand its literacy offerings, but computer space is limited. Technology is quickly becoming an essential learning and communication medium. More effort is needed to expand current computer literacy programs and to infuse computer literacy and technology into literacy offerings, such as use of e-learning, videos, distance learning, and TV and CD instruction.

Step Five: Creating an Awareness of Literacy Issues. Changing the existing attitudes toward literacy and learning is also a need evident from survey

results. One of the primary concerns expressed during the focus groups was that there is a lack of will among many adults in both counties to change. There was some concern that many still do not understand the importance of literacy to function effectively as a parent, worker, citizen or health consumer/provider. Focus group participants put this within a cultural context. Their comments are an insightful window into understanding the cultural changes occurring in both counties.

There were several factors that influenced the growth of both Lancaster and Chester Counties and how literacy and education were regarded in general. Both counties developed during a time when the textile mills, the major employer, did not require advanced literacy skills. Another factor that influenced the way literacy needs were perceived in both counties was the rural nature of both counties. In addition to the textile industry both counties relied heavily on farming; small farmers are still an important part of the economic base in both counties. However, rural South Carolina is also changing, farming has become much more sophisticated. Finally, Lancaster and Chester counties were in large part divided communities. Segregation in the South created two communities, one white and the other black. Many of the disparities in education are the result of practices that disadvantaged blacks and other minorities.

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While in the larger society, cultural attitudes have changed, and roles and responsibilities have shifted, a significant portion of the population in the survey area still has not yet fully incorporated into their cultural values and behaviors an attitude that they should set the standard for being literate and educated. Because of these past and present cultural shifts, reportedly low literate individuals and families continue to get mixed signals.

More effort needs to be placed on public awareness of the costs and consequences of not being functionally literate. Families need to get the message

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that they are the primary educators of their children and it is their responsibility to insure that they and their children are functionally literate. Employers need to understand that, because of the counties' roots, employers themselves are very important in sending messages both directly and indirectly about the value of education and being literate.

More awareness of what literacy means is needed. Literacy means so much more than just being able to read or write. Generally, public awareness of the four basic literacy skills sets needs to be developed. More awareness of how literacy skills relate to effective functioning as a parent, worker, citizen and health consumer/provider is required.

Citizens who are already well educated also need to better understand that everyone will benefit when literacy and basic skill levels are raised. If smaller communities are going to survive, they need to be able to attract new business and industries. Medium and large-scale operations do not settle where quality of life features are low. Business leaders look for communities that offer a wide variety of services and amenities for their employees and their families. Good schools, libraries and access to culture and entertainment make a community more attractive to employers who wish to either to relocate or to expand. When literacy rates are so low, then the quality of life is generally low. People need to find good stable employment to support themselves and their families. If no new jobs are available the young people leave the community in search of more opportunities. Unless literacy levels increase there will not be enough functionally literate adults present who can successfully start businesses in rural communities. In time if employment opportunities are not present, talent and resources are drained from rural areas and flow to more urban centers. Neighboring North Carolina, particularly the burgeoning Charlotte area, stands to gain both revenue and talent from Lancaster and Chester counties unless changes are made.

Poor literacy skills are closely linked to a number of social problems—poverty, unemployment, crime and violence. In order to fight any of these problems it is necessary to deal with literacy first. As with all problems of this magnitude,

there are enormous obstacles to overcome, but communities first must be aware that the problem does exist and must be committed to finding a solution.

Next Steps in Understanding Why There Is A Sizeable Adult Population That Is Not Functionally Literate.

Community developers assert that unless an issue is grounded it can't be properly dealt with or resolved. "Grounding an issue" means determining the specifics of a local context that make something a concern. There needs to be a process that involves a broader spectrum of county and community leaders. While the survey begins to provide the specifics of the local context in which literacy issues reside, it is recommended that further steps be taken to clarify exactly what local community features have made literacy development an issue in the first place and where the community desires to go. Four primary questions need to be answered: Why are so many adults in the survey area not functionally literate? What is it that keeps so many adults from becoming literate? What are the specific impacts of having a sizeable portion of the adult population that is functionally illiterate on, among other things, adult and child well-being, the economy, school readiness, poverty conditions, and health care costs? What does the community want to do about it?

The definition of literacy has shifted and changed over time to meet the needs of a changing society. Literacy is more than just learning to read. The citizens of Lancaster and Chester counties must determine where their vision of the future takes them. What will be our quality of life? How much unnecessary spending will we allow in order to deal with the results of illiteracy? What local jobs will be available in the next century? Will our local folks get them, or will others? Who will we be? Will we be able to participate effectively as a democracy? What will be our condition? What does the future hold for our children? Will we have a vibrant economy? Community leaders must determine what literacy skills are needed to shape their vision of the future.

An effective adult education and literacy system in Lancaster and Chester counties will not occur without strategically building it. Community leaders have a long way to go to build an effective literacy system.

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Table 2. Literacy Providers in Lancaster County,Great Falls and Fort Lawn, South Carolina

Name of Organization	Type of Program	# of Active Students	# of Students Waiting	# Students Completed	# of Students Dropped Out	# of Paid Staff	# of Active Volunteers	# of Inactive Volunteers	Support Services For Students
Catawba Technology Educational Consortium	Life Skills Workplace	No information provided	No information provided	700	0	2 FT 1PT	5	0	-Counseling
Lancaster Co. Literacy Council	Literacy/Workplace Literacy/Life Skills and ESL	63-Literacy 104-ESL	0	0	0	2 FT 7PT	31	18	-Learning materials -Counseling
Head Start	Family Literacy/Born to Read	94 Family Literacy	40	92	2	14FT 1 PT	15	77	-Child Care Transportation -Meals -Learning Materials & Training
Lancaster County Adult Education	Adult Basic Education GED and High School Completion	251 GED 98 H.S. 7 Other	0	25 GED 22 H.S. 7 Other	41 GED 20 H.S.	4 FT 12PT	0	0	-Learning Materials -Counseling
Lancaster County Council on Aging	Life Skills	92	0	N/A	0	8 FT 10PT	0	0	-Meals -Health Screening
New Covenant Development Foundation	Computer Literacy	40	10	36	4	3 FT 3 PT	2	0	-Learning materials -Health Screening
Springs Industries Inc.	Literacy/GED Adult Basic Ed ESL	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	0	0	0	Supplies and Materials
Lancaster County DSS	Referrals to Literacy	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Van Wyck Presbyterian Church	Life Skills (Religious)	75	0	0	0	1 (?)	6	0	Learning Materials

Table 3. Matrix of Literacy Services

Explanation: The #3 indicates deep involvement. The #2 indicates moderate involvement. The #1 indicates littl

	General Literacy	ABE/Basic Skills	Family Literacy	Workplace Literacy	ESL	Health Literacy	Parenting	Life Skills	Literacy for Adults with Learning Disabilities	Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation	Aging	Computer Literacy
Literacy council	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (2)	3 (2)	3 (3)	3 (3)
Council on Aging	3 (1)		3 (1)					3 (1)			3 (3)	
First Steps			3 (2)*			3 (2)	3 (2)	3 (2)				
Adult Education	3 (3)	3 (3)		3 (2)	3 (3)							3 (3)
DSS	2 (2)	2 (2)	2 (2)	2 (2)	2 (2)	2 (2)	3 (3)	3 (3)	2 (2)	2 (2)	2 (2)	2 (2)
Lancaster Library	2 (2)	2 (1)	2 (2)		2 (2)	3 (2)	2 (2)					3 (3) **
Churches ***	3 (1)	3 (1)	3 (1)	3 (1)	3 (1)	3 (1)	3 (1)	3 (1)	3 (1)	3 (1)	3 (1)	3 (1)
Workplace	3 (1)	3 (1)		3 (1)	3 (1)		3 (1)			3 (2)		3 (3)
Public Schools	3 (2)		3 (1-2)	3 (3)	3 (1)		3 (1-2)	3 (3)				
Community Organizations	3 (2)	3 (2)	3 (3)			3 (3)	3 (3)	3 (2)	2 (1)	3 (2)		3 (2)
DHEC						3 (3)						
Voc/Rehab				3 (3)		3 (2)		3 (1)	3 (2)	3 (3)		3(1)
SC Drug and Alcohol			2 (2)				3 (2)	3 (3)		3 (3)		

*First Steps has only recently been funded and has not fully implemented all program components.

** The library needs a new computer lab.

*** The churches that are involved in literacy are doing a good job. But not many are involved.

Table 4. Five Levels of Literacy Proficiency

	Prose	Document	Quantitative
Level One	Most of the tasks in this level require the reader to read relatively short text to locate a single piece of information which is identical to or synonymous with the information given in the question or directive.	Tasks in this level tend to require the reader either to locate a piece of information based on a literal match or to enter information from personal knowledge onto a document.	Tasks in this level require readers to perform single, relatively simple arithmetic operations, such as addition.
Level Two	Some tasks in this level require readers to locate a single piece of information in the text; however, several distractors or plausible but incorrect pieces of information may be present, or low-level inferences may be required. Other tasks require the reader to integrate two or more pieces of information or to compare and contrast easily identifiable information based on a criterion provided in the question or directive.	Tasks in this level are more varied than those in Level 1. Some require the readers to match a single piece of information; however, several distractors may be present or the match may require low-level inferences.	Tasks in this level typically require readers to perform a single operation using numbers that are either stated in the task or easily located in the material.
Level Three	Tasks in this level tend to require readers to make literal or synonymous matches between the text and information given in the task, or to make matches that require low-level inferences. Other tasks ask readers to integrate information from dense or lengthy text that contains no organizational aids such as headings. Readers may also be asked to generate a response based on information that can be easily identified in the text. Distracting information is present, but is not located near the correct information.	Some tasks in this level require the reader to integrate multiple pieces of information from one or more documents. Others ask readers to cycle through rather complex tables or graphs which contain information that is irrelevant or inappropriate to the task.	In tasks in this level, two or more numbers are typically needed to solve the problem, and these must be found in the material. The operations needed can be determined from the arithmetic relation terms used in the question or directive.
Level Four	These tasks require readers to perform multiple-feature matches and to integrate or synthesize information from complex or lengthy passages. More complex inferences are needed to perform successfully.	Tasks in this level, like those at the previous levels, ask readers to perform multiple-feature matches, cycle through documents, and integrate information; however, the require a greater degree of inferencing.	These tasks tend to require readers to perform two or more sequential operations or a single operation in which the quantities are found in different types of displays, or the operations must be inferred from semantic information given or drawn from prior knowledge.
Level Five	Some tasks in this level require the reader to search for information in dense text which contains a number of plausible distractors. Others ask readers to make high-level inferences or use specialized background knowledge. Some tasks ask readers to contrast complex information.	Tasks in this level require the reader to search through complex displays that contain multiple distractors, to make high-level text-based inferences, and to use specialized knowledge.	These tasks require readers to perform multiple operations sequentially. They must disembed the features of the problem from the text or rely on background knowledge to determine the quantities or operations needed.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Adult Literacy Survey, 1992. For examples of NASL questions for each level see http://www.nces.ed.gov/naal/defining/

End Notes

[1] Although Great Falls and Fort Lawn are the only Chester County communities in the J. Marion Sims Foundation service area, certain data could only be obtained by county or school district. References to data for Chester County can be assumed to be for the entire county. Whenever possible specific references are made to Great Falls and Fort Lawn.

[2] See http://www.nifl.gov/ for a full copy of the National Literacy Act of 1991.

[3] Information courtesy of the National Institute for Literacy.

[4] *See the 2001 South Carolina Young Adults Count* report and the *2001 Kids Count* reports at http://www.orss.state.sc.us/hd/index.html

[5] Kirsh, I., Jungeblut, A., Jenkins, L., and Kolstad, A. (1993). *Adult Literacy in America: National Literacy Survey*. National Center for Education Statistics.

[6] This figure is based on 2000 data from U.S. Census Bureau. The categories don't conform neatly to the definition of "adult" used by the literacy field (i.e. 16+) so the count is a bit high. See http://www.ors.state.sc.us/ for census review.

[7] Author unknown. (date unknown). "All GED test scores administered by counties." A report given to the authors by David Stout, staff member, State Department of Education.

[8] These figures are based on Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) estimates. See http://www.casas.org

[9] Several agencies or institutions reported that they offered literacy programs, but upon careful review of the surveys it was determined that some were broadly interpreting "literacy." These numbers reflect only those who were enrolled in adult literacy (basic skills) programs. The numbers reflected in the survey vary by some degree. The total number of students reported in most categories totaled 373, however, when students were reported by race—the total was only 307. This discrepancy is probably due to the fact that reporting by race is optional. Some students may have declined to identify by race or may have indicated that they were biracial or multiracial. The literacy check-up did not include a category for those claiming multiracial status.

[10] Census data includes 15 year olds in the adult category, however, the Foundation is focussing their efforts on adult learners who are at least 17 years of age.

[11] Although there seems to be a large number of students (121 students were reported on the survey) who are age 65 or older, when compared to the total numbers of adults in this category who are in need of services, this population is underserved. According to the South Carolina Council on Aging, over 32% of all adults in the state who are over the age of 60 have less than a 9th grade education.

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[12] These figures are based on the Department of Commerce's community profile of business activity and CASAS estimates of the percentage of employed adults at level 1 and 2 proficiency levels. See http://www.casas.org and http://www.teamsc.com/ While it would seem that the rates for Chester should be higher than Lancaster they aren't because Chester's unemployment rate is higher.

[13] See the South Carolina Literacy Resource Center site at http://www.sclrc.org/indes.html

[14] Lang, B., *Assessing the impact of current literacy programs: a qualitative analysis of participant responses* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1997.

[15] White, W. and Polson, C. "Adults with disabilities in adult basic education centers" *Adult Basic Education*, vol.9, no. 1, Spring, 1999. pp. 36-45.

[16] *South Carolina State Plan: Adult Education and Family Literacy Under Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998*. South Carolina State Department of Education, p. 15.

[17] *Skills that Work 2000*. South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, p. 2.

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Clemson University
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